



family connections

Winter 2006 Issue



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One Big Happy Family for Hannah

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Among the many adoptions finalized across Tennessee during **National Adoption Month in November 2005** was that of five year-old Hannah by her resource parents Keith and Kelly Hampson. Hannah is diagnosed with traumatic brain injury due to non-accidental head injury, also known as Shaken Baby Syndrome.

Hannah's injury occurred just one month shy of her third birthday. Mrs. Hampson admits that it was a complicated and scary time when Hannah first moved into their home about two years ago. **Children's Corner of the East Tennessee Children's Hospital Rehabilitation Center** initially helped the family to learn about Hannah's needs and how to best care for her. Hannah was on a feeding tube and the Hampsons' birth children were "not so comfortable" with her at the time. **However, the Hampsons' son and daughter, now eighteen and fourteen, soon learned how to help care for Hannah. These days they help feed her, carry her around, change her diaper, and "spoil" her. They treat Hannah "just like another sibling" and the three children "click" together very well. Hannah and the Hampsons' son fondly call each other "Dude," while the two girls are very bonded with each other and have a great big-sister-little-sister connection.**

Hannah has a seizure disorder and cerebral palsy on her left side. She sees a neurologist as well as a doctor who monitors her equipment, including her helmet, braces, and wheelchair, and her progress with occupational, physical, and speech therapies. Hannah attends a developmental preschool and her prognosis is that she will never be able to live independently or hold a vocation. **Hannah will always need constant care. Mrs. Hampson admits that it can be "very taxing" to care for a medically fragile child, especially at first. For support, the Hampsons turn to their very "accepting and understanding" group of friends. Mrs. Hampson's mother and sister are registered nurses; although they live in Ohio, they help support the family as a "sounding board." In addition, the family's church is really accepting and "everyone just adores Hannah." Also, there is a local epilepsy association in town, which the Hampsons don't feel a need to utilize at this time but know they always can in the future. For outdoor activities, the family enjoys visiting a handicapped-accessible park located near the home.**



Mr. and Mrs. Hampson prefer to specifically care for medically fragile children. **When asked how they came to this decision, Mrs. Hampson explains that when growing up, both Mr. and Mrs. Hampson were exposed to children with special medical needs. Mr. Hampson's childhood best friend had a brother with Down's Syndrome and Mrs. Hampson's grandparents ran the local home for children and adults with a wide variety of developmental disabilities and medical needs. As children, Mr. and Mrs. Hampson were**



May is National Foster Care Month

both "very comfortable" around children with special needs and this carried over into their adult lives. They also chose to become resource parents for medically fragile children because they feel these children are often "lost in the system" and it is "harder for them to get a step up." Mrs. Hampson explains, "If the match is right, you fall in love with the child, regardless of the needs."

This placement was not always smooth sailing. For the first six months Hannah was with the Hampsons, she often screamed aloud as her brain was mending. During this time, Hannah was in a level three coma and needed to be at a level ten in order to come out. This was a trying time for the family and they were able to depend on their support system and get through this difficult time. They knew Hannah's brain would stabilize and develop over time. Mrs. Hampson states, "We don't love Hannah any differently than our birth children, she was just waiting somewhere else for us." She also says, "All children have issues, even birth children have issues. You just fall in love with the child and everything else that comes with it. There is no difference, just that the issues are different."

Mrs. Hampson advises resource parents, particularly those of medically fragile children, to "surround yourself with people who support what you are doing. Stay open to learning more. Somewhere, someone has gone through it. Take everyone's helpful hints and do what works for you." She encourages other families to ask plenty of questions to find out what's out there and what's available. "Families should also be open and willing to ask for and receive help." Mrs. Hampson also "reads like crazy." One of the most helpful books that she has found is *Children with Traumatic Brain Injury: A Parents' Guide* from the Special Needs Collection at Woodbine House. The family also does a lot of research on the Internet. She notes that it is important to stay aware of new information because there are always new therapies and drugs coming available. In addition, Hannah is always going through changes and the family needs to be aware of them and question if they are related to her initial injury, medicine, or something else. They find it helpful to read other families' stories and know that what Hannah is going through is "okay" and "typical." Their research and self-education also help them to understand any new issues with Hannah, i.e. behavior, and learn about some of the techniques other families have used. Mrs. Hampson also advises families to stay in close communication with the school system. The Hampson family maintains good communication with Hannah's teacher and school to check in and make sure that the services are meeting her needs and everyone's questions are answered. If there are any issues,

they make sure to address them right away. Additionally, the family practices Hannah's lessons with her at home on a daily basis to help her retain what she learns in school.

When asked about the different challenges in parenting a medically fragile child, Mrs. Hampson replies that keeping on top of all of the different situations - Hannah's health, needs, appointments, equipment - can be quite challenging. However, she says it hasn't really been different from raising her two birth children, "It's just a part of parenting." The rewarding moments include the first time Hannah said "Mama," and when she says "I love you" as they tuck her into bed every night. Mrs. Hampson also appreciates the times when they get together with Hannah's birth grandparents and members from her birth family. Mrs. Hampson says, "It's great because we have such a huge family now and we get along so well. We have a whole new family." The Hampsons' extended family lives hundreds of miles away. They have become very close with Hannah's paternal birth relatives, not only extending the size of their family but also the amount of support that they receive. Hannah's birth grandparents treat the Hampsons' children as their grandchildren and the relatives even came to the Hampsons' son's eighteenth birthday party. More importantly, they attended Hannah's adoption celebration and were included in adoption celebration photos. Mrs. Hampson states, "It is important for Hannah. Even though she does not remember them from before her injury, it is important that they be allowed to remain in her life...they had nothing to do with the incident." The Hampsons and Hannah's birth relatives spend the holidays together, including Christmas and New Year's, and everyone is included. Although the families get along very well, Mrs. Hampson suggests that resource families talk about how they are going to handle outside people, such as relatives, because at some point it will become an issue. Mrs. Hampson admits that her family's openness to Hannah's relatives was not automatic. It took them some time getting to know the relatives to realize that the injury was not their fault and they did not do it.

Over the past two years, Hannah has developed into a delightful five year-old girl who has thrived in the Hampson home. Mrs. Hampson advises other prospective and current resource families, including those considering parenting a medically fragile child, "Pray about it. This is a huge step that you are taking and it is going to change your life." In making a life-long commitment to care for Hannah, the Hampsons have been able to provide Hannah with one large, loving family - changing their lives, as well as Hannah's.

Balloons and Barbeque Celebrating Adoption Across the State

This past November, several regions across Tennessee celebrated National Adoption Month. **Knox County** observed Adoption Day on November 16, with a program honoring newly formed families. City Mayor Bill Haslam and County Mayor Mike Ragsdale each spoke at the occasion. As a special treat, the celebration also honored Bill Williams for his work in helping children find permanency through the Monday's Child feature on WBIR-TV in Knoxville.

On a sunny November 18, **Dyer County** marked the occasion with balloons. Chancellor Steven Stafford, County Mayor Richard Hill, Chancery Court Clerk John Hoff and staff assisted Dimple Dudley, team coordinator, and Eugenia Boatright, team leader, of the Department of Children's Services with releasing balloons into the clear blue sky. The telephone number for the region's Adoption Hotline was written on a slip of paper within each balloon. Chancellor Stafford and Mayor Hill also signed a proclamation recognizing National Adoption Day in Dyer County. A display board placed in the Dyer County Courthouse continues to promote awareness of adoption and the need for resource parents. "Hundreds of Tennessee children wonder every day when they can go home to live with a family," Dimple Dudley told the *State Gazette*. "All of them need families to have a fair chance at life. They all just want to be loved and belong to a family."



The following day nearly one hundred foster children, foster parents, adoptive parents, and DCS staff attended the Northwest Region's annual **Adoption Fun Day**. The event was held at "Best Parties Ever" near Milan where children were treated to a multitude of activities. Everyone enjoyed wagon rides, pony rides, a petting zoo, corn maze, and three gigantic "inflatables" for bouncing, sliding, and playing. Lunch was provided for all and included barbeque, baked beans, slaw, chips, brownies, and drinks. The hot food was extra warming to all after the activities on a quite cool, overcast, and windy



day. The weather kept some families away, but those who were able to attend had so much fun they didn't think about the cool temperatures...especially the children. Fall issues of the TAP Book and life book summaries of Northwest's children in guardianship were available for viewing. Pictures were made of children, families, and the whole group who attended.

Adoption Day celebrations were held in courtrooms across the state as adoptions were finalized. On November 19, Chancellor Arnold Goldin finalized adoptions in the **Shelby County** Chancery Court in Memphis, while three towns in East Tennessee, Maryville, Morristown, and Clinton, observed an "adoption weekend."



DCS partnered with three judges in

Miracles Waiting To Happen



Meet Bradley - 9/21/91

Bradley enjoys playing basketball and participating in Special Olympics' events. He likes to go to the movies, roller skating, and to the aquarium.

Bradley's case manager says that Bradley is a handsome child with a lot of potential. He says that Bradley has a sense of humor and cares about others.

Bradley needs a family without children who can provide structure and a high level of supervision in a loving environment. His family will need to advocate for his special educational and behavioral needs.

For more information:
Toi Douglass - 615-253-3299



Meet Schakeeri

Schakeeri attends a performing arts school and takes these activities very seriously. She has the ability to do well in school.

Schakeeri's counselor says that she would benefit from getting individual attention where her talents and intelligence can really be focused on and maximized.

Schakeeri needs to be in a home where she can get a lot of attention, her talents can continue to blossom, and she can grow into her full potential. She needs a lot of encouragement and praise to boost her self-confidence.

For more information:
Adrienne McCroskey - 423-634-6600



Meet Prince - 3/23/90

Prince enjoys cooking, shopping, and eating. He also likes sports, especially weight lifting. He is very charming and loves to be the center of attention.

Prince has a great personality and likes to meet new people.

According to his foster parent, Prince is a very lovable child. He is very obedient to his foster parent, but sometimes acts like the teenager that he is.

Prince will benefit from a one or two-parent family. His greatest need is for a loving, nurturing family who will provide him with structure and the opportunity to enjoy being a teenager. Prince's family should also understand and support his wishes to remain in contact with his birth siblings.

For more information:
Igina Perteet - 901-578-4235



Meet Brittany - 4/1/92

Brittany loves scrapbooking, quilting, and crafts of all kinds. She enjoys watching movies, playing her flute, and listening to music.

Brittany's case manager says that Brittany is a very sweet child who thrives on positive attention and can do whatever she sets her mind to do. She can be a very responsible young lady when she wants to and is very good at helping others.

Brittany needs a parent or parents who will provide the love, structure, and nurturing that she needs to feel safe, important, and valued. Her family will need to provide structure with consistent rules. Brittany would like to maintain contact with her younger sisters through letters, phone calls, and visits.

For more information:
Angel Mitchell - 931-766-1488, Ext. 203

Help Us Find A Family



Meet Rebecca - 7/29/89

Rebecca is a very independent, strong-willed girl. She is not shy about meeting new people and states that she enjoys making new friends.

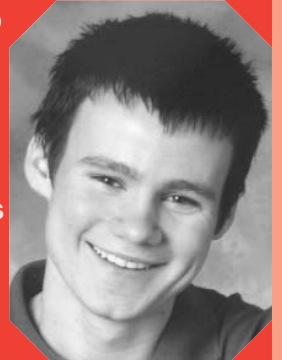
Rebecca's counselor says that Rebecca is quick to accept responsibility for her behavior and responds positively when adults are fair and firm.

Rebecca needs a family who can provide her with structure and consistency. She has younger siblings with whom she will not be adopted and she does have a desire to remain in touch with them.

For more information:

Cindy Harmon - 865-481-3972, Ext. 406

Meet Jonathan - 9/3/89



Jonathan is quiet when he meets new people but he quickly warms up after he becomes comfortable. He is described as a good company keeper and has been known to hold his own in a conversation. He loves playing basketball and football. He aspires one day to play football for UT Knoxville.

Jonathan is basically a good guy in need of a loving one or two parent family who will be totally committed to his educational, emotional, and mental health needs.

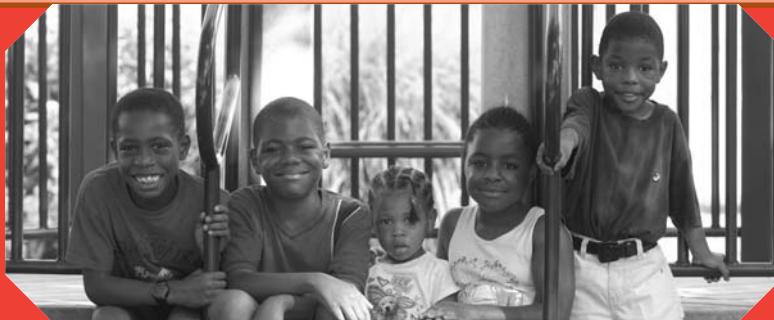
For more information:

James Denney - 615-443-5206

Meet Jasper
DOB - 3/24/97

Meet Charles
DOB - 6/4/93

Meet KeShawn
DOB - 3/20/00



Meet Jasmine
DOB - 6/7/02

Meet Mary
DOB - 8/26/94

Jasper likes to draw, play basketball and drums, and be active. He enjoys school and makes excellent grades. Charles loves computer games, game boys, cartoons, and movies. He likes to play outside most of the time. Jasmine enjoys Dora cartoons, playing with her siblings and other foster children, and is very quiet until she gets to know you. Mary would rather watch her foster mother cook and do her daily activities, asking a lot of questions, rather than play with her siblings. She likes to play school and soccer. KeShawn is very loving. He has grown with his speech and language and has learned to be more outgoing and talkative.

These children need a family that will accept them together. They all need a family that will be committed to them through ups and downs. They need a family who will advocate for their educational, social, and emotional needs. They need a family that will provide them with safety, love, patience, reassurance, consistency, and structure.

For more information:

Bettie Wills - 615-532-4188



these towns to set aside time on their dockets to finalize adoptions and help increase adoption awareness. Judge Young finalized six adoptions in **Blount County**, Chancellor Frierson finalized nine adoptions in **Hamblen County**, and Chancellor Lantrip

finalized four adoptions in **Anderson County**. Chancellor Bryant's Court in **Monroe County** also finalized three adoptions. DCS also hosted luncheons at the Blount County, Hamblen County, and Anderson County DCS offices after each finalization day. A professional photographer was on hand to take each family's portrait. Families were presented with copies of these photos as well as candid shots from their special day. The local bar association in Hamblen County provided balloons, special gifts, and refreshments for the new families in Morristown. City Mayor Gary Johnson and County Mayor David Purkey read proclamations declaring November 19, 2005 as National Adoption Day in Morristown, Hamblen County, Tennessee.



Thanks to Janice Truitt, Eugenia Boatright, Carolyn Todd, Dana Lowry, and Terra Temple of the *State Gazette* for sharing stories and photos from these events.

I AM A SOUL

*I am a soul without form,
Without a Soul I would be nothing,
Just a body walking around without a meaning.*

What is a soul?

*The principle of life feeling thoughts and
actions,
Not knowing when to let go centered round
attractions.*

*I am a soul clothed in flesh,
Flesh the color of mud.*

I have extra shades of melon in my skin.

*Brown is the color,
If you look into my eyes you will see the marks
of my biological mother.*

I AM A SOUL

*A soul that has tears that come from deep
within,*

A soul that cries because they lack in kin.

I AM A SOUL.

*A soul that needs that one person to help them
through the day,*

A soul that cries out when they pray.

I AM A SOUL.

*I am a soul that feels lonely, depressed, and
stressed.*

*The soul that knows the storm is
Almost over, but expects another test.*

I AM A SOUL.

*A soul that's very insecure the soul that feels
impure.*

*Yet I am a soul that will keep on striving and
striving.*

*Even though temptations come and they keep
on lying and lying.*

I AM A SOUL.

*I am a soul that still has faith and will do what is
required*

*Realizing the more I keep pushing I become
more and more tired.*

*Even though I walk around with a frown
My soul has the capacity to endure till the end
Ups and downs.*

I AM A SOUL

By Jacinta

For More Information
Regina Perry - 615-253-
5250



The Family Connections Favorite Five List: Five Ways Resource Parents Can Help Recruit New Resource Families

- 1** Volunteer to sit on a Panel for PATH Intake Meeting or Session 8. Invite a friend to join the class and listen in.
- 2** Don't be shy! Wear a button ("Ask Me About Adoption" or "Ask Me About Resource Parenting") around the mall, flea market, ball game, and anywhere where there is a crowd. Be sure to have the phone number or brochures for your agency to share with others.
- 3** Ask your church, supper club, or civic group for five minutes once a month to talk about resource parenting or a waiting child.
- 4** Suggest adding a book about foster care or adoption (fiction or non-fiction) to your book club reading list. Another idea: start a book club with your local resource parent association - focus on books about parenting children in foster care.
- 5** Display a poster about foster care/adoption or the profile of a waiting child at your desk at work.

New Year's Bonus: Be Proud of What You Do! Your Optimism is Contagious!

Keep Children Reading!

Children who are in the foster care system are sometimes behind in their grade-level standards for literacy. The largest factor in the decline in children's literacy is family instability. Resource families can help children to improve their reading skills by placing an emphasis on reading and incorporating reading into the regular family routine. In their article, "Making Reading Count for Kids In Care," Margaret Genisio and Sheri Wallace share a few ideas for resource parents to consider when encouraging children to grow in their reading skills. Starting with day one, resource families should have lots of reading materials handy and available in the child's living area. Comic books, the sports section of the newspaper or age-appropriate magazines will all help to encourage a child's interest in reading.

Families should also accompany children to the library; give them a tour and show them how to check out and care for a library book. Libraries also offer other activities, including story hours and reading clubs, which children might want to join. At home, establish a family reading time, only five or ten minutes to start, that doesn't interfere with other activities in the home. To help children think about their reading, start each child with a reading journal. For young readers, this may include very simple questions while others may draw pictures. Older

children can keep a log of books read with a short description of the book or several pages of discussion. Other journaling ideas include writing a letter to the author or to someone who has not yet read the book. Resource parents and children can also designate a special section in the journal for writing notes back and forth about the book.



To read the complete article, visit:

<http://connectforkids.org/node/324/print>

For other reading ideas, including "Reading Rays," "Scrapbook," "Read Aloud!" and "Hot! Hot! Hot!" from *50 Fun Ways to Improve Reading*, try:

<http://familyeducation.com>

conference corner

On March 18, 2006, the University of Memphis will host its 2006 Regional Conference - "Strengthening Families Through Partnerships" - at the Holiday Inn on the campus of the University. It is expected that resource parents will be able to earn up to seven training hours by attending all sessions.

Austin Peay State University and Tennessee State University are planning a joint conference for the Davidson County and Mid-Cumberland Regions on April 1, 2006 in Nashville. Southern Adventist University and the University of Tennessee at Martin are also planning to hold regional conferences in the spring.

For information on events and upcoming regional conferences, be sure to contact your Resource Parent Support Unit (RPSU) and check out the TFACA website (www.tfaca.org). The TFACA website also includes information on the Foster Parent Bill of Rights, links to informative websites, and the *Fosterer* newsletter.



Please note that we would love to hear feedback from you at any time. If you have a foster care, relative caregiver, adoption, or reunification story that you would like to submit for publication, please contact Scarlett Miles at 800-807-3228 or via email, scarlett.miles@state.tn.us. If you would like to discontinue receiving the newsletter, please contact Scarlett Miles via email or telephone.

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